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William Butler Yeats and the Thoor Ballylee

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WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS AND THE THOOR BALLYLEE

by

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M.K.

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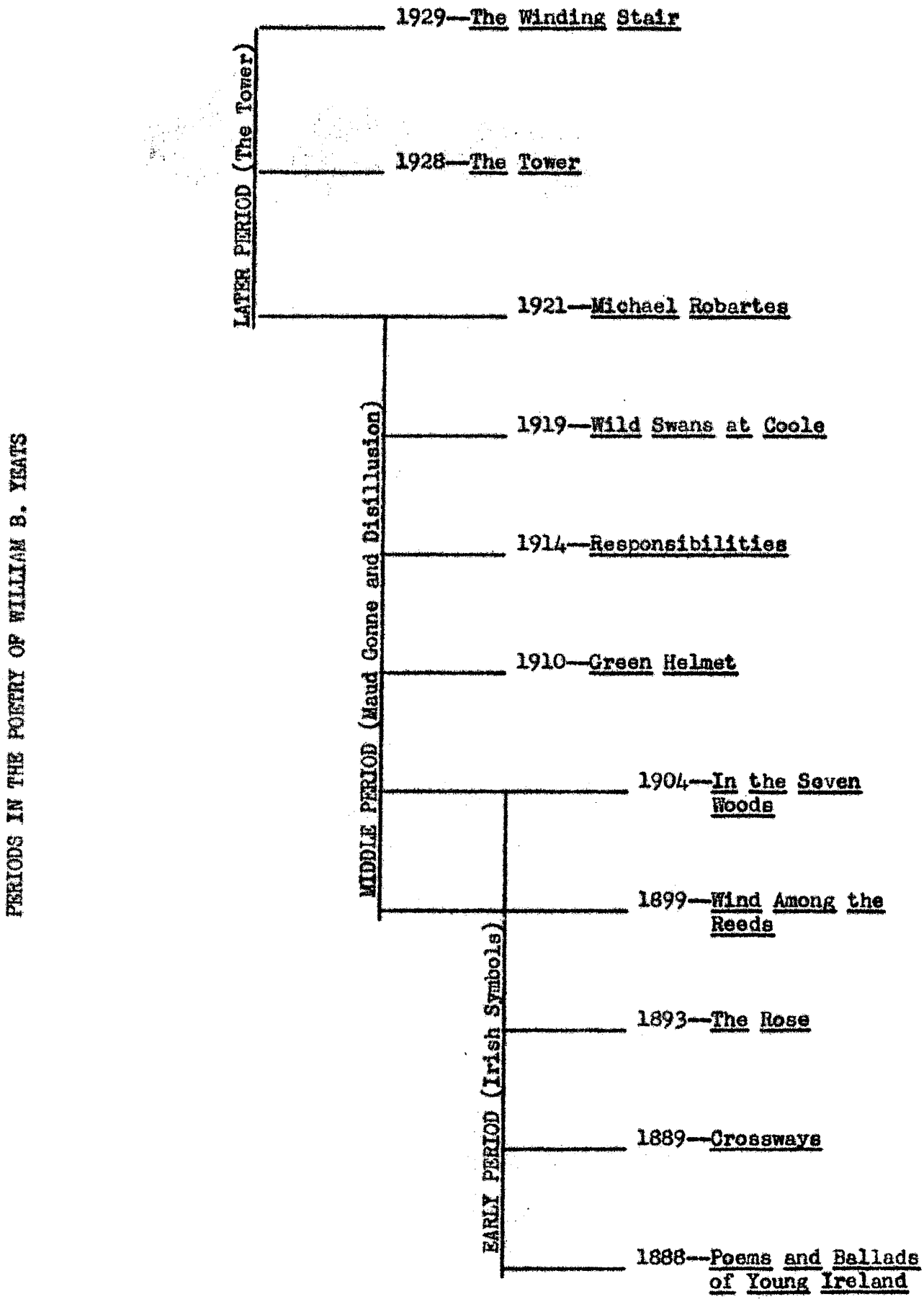

CHAPTER I

YEATS BEFORE THE TOWER

I made my song a coat
Covered with embroideries
Out of old mythologies
From heel to throat....

Among contemporary poets, William Butler Yeats remains unsurpassed. His achievement as a poet is even greater when one considers the struggle which was a part of it. Although it is difficult and, perhaps, unwise to claim immortality for contemporary art, the critics have not hesitated to applaud Yeats and to acclaim him as one of the great poets of all time. W. Somerset Maugham said of Yeats: "He was certainly the greatest poet of his generation, and I think it is a safe bet that he will occupy an honourable, more, an exalted place in the long line of poets who, since Chaucer have made our literature splendid."[1]

In comparing Yeats to the romantic poets, Frederick Reid wrote: "If Shelley is a great poet, if Keats and Coleridge and Rosetti are great poets, then Mr. Yeats is a great poet also, greater, I think, than any of these."[2]

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1. Maugham, Introduction to English and American Literature, p. 601.

2. Reid, William Butler Yeats, a Critical Study,

Yeats not only expressed his own personality, but also revealed the spirit of Ireland in his work. As one critic has said: "The color of his style is the color of his thought, and the color of his thought is the color of a genius larger than his own, the genius of a race."[3]

But Yeats is more than the spokesman for the Irish people, he is the poet of his generation, a poet who is necessary to understand the contemporary period in literature. T. S. Eliot considered him as "the greatest poet of our time---certainly the greatest in his language, and so far as I can judge, in any language....There are some poets whose poetry can be considered more or less in isolation, for experience and delight. There are others whose poetry, though giving equally experience and delight, has a larger historical importance. Yeats was one of the latter; he was one of those few whose history is the history of our time, who are a part of the consciousness of their age, which cannot be understood without them."[4]

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3. Macleod, "The Later Work of W. B. Yeats," North American Review 175: (1902) 474.

4. Hone, J., William Butler Yeats, p. 513.

William Butler Yeats was born at Sandymount, Dublin, on June 13, 1865. His father, John Butler Yeats, a noted artist, poet and philosopher, had much influence on his son's thinking in later life. Yeats spent most of his childhood years in County Sligo, where he loved to fish, climb mountains, and hear about magic and faeries. Soon, however, the Yeatses moved to London; young Yeats was sent to Goldolphin School, Hammersmith, which impressed him as rough and crude. During their stay in England, the Yeats family, with the exception of their father, felt as if they were exiles.

Because of financial reasons, the Yeatses moved back to Ireland in 1880, where Yeats finished his schooling at the Erasmus Smith School, Dublin. Because of his father's urging, Yeats entered an art school where he developed a technique reminiscent of the Pre-Rhapaelite painters. However, while he was studying art, Yeats was beginning to write poetry. Before he was twenty, several of his poems were published in Irish newspapers and magazines.

When Yeats decided to give up art and to devote himself to poetry, he was, in a way, renouncing his

father's influence on his life. However, the break between the father and son was never complete, and Yeats retained many of his father's ideas about religion and philosophy.

Shortly after the publication of "The Wanderings of Oisin" in 1889, Yeats met Maud Gonne, the beautiful leader of the Young Ireland societies. She persuaded Yeats to join with them in helping to create a national feeling in Ireland. Yeats devoted his efforts to establishing literary societies in both London and Dublin and to the founding of a National Theatre, the Abbey Theatre. In this theatre, the plays of Synge, Lady Gregory, and Yeats were first performed. It was here that Yeats's intensely patriotic play, "Cathleen ni Houlihan" was presented with Maud Gonne in the leading role.

Although Yeats and his co-workers spent many years trying to establish a literary consciousness in Ireland, their efforts were largely futile. They could never succeed in interesting the middle class in a revival of culture.

During his many years of association with Maud Gonne, Yeats hoped that she would ultimately consent

to marry him; her beauty, spirit, and charm were the inspiration for his love lyrics and for his work in Irish politics. Unfortunately, Miss Gonne married John MacBride, an Irish patriot and soldier. Because of this unhappy love affair, Yeats threw himself with more vigor into Irish politics and into poetry. He was recognized as the center of the Irish literary movement and as the spokesman for Ireland because of his devotion to his country.

In 1917, Yeats married Georgie Hyde-Lees, who was a great help to him in his work because of her supposed ability to communicate with spirits through automatic writing. It was largely through her help that he developed a concrete basis for his symbolism.

From 1922 to 1928, Yeats served as a member in the Irish senate and was regarded as one of the leaders in politics. However, his health began to fail, and he found it necessary to withdraw from political life. Yeats traveled abroad extensively in his later years in an effort to find a climate which would afford relief to his rheumatism. On January 28, 1939, he died at Roquebrune, France, where he was buried until his body could be removed to Ireland.

During his long career as a poet, William Butler Yeats was constantly struggling to establish an authority or system as a basis of art. Although he did not achieve a satisfactory philosophy of his art until late in life, Yeats was never without some specific ideal which served as a guiding force in his work. These ideals also became a system of elaborate symbolism, for Yeats, like Blake, believed in the indissoluble marriage of all great art with symbol.

Ireland, with its magic, legends, and sagas, first stimulated Yeats's imagination and provided a variety of symbols for the poet. Because of his use of Irish material and his interest in nationalism, Yeats was partly responsible for a revival of literature in Ireland. Hoping to find in Ireland his philosophy of art, Yeats plunged into the literary movement and discovered that a true literary consciousness, which was essentially national, was forming in Ireland.[5] This new consciousness of Irish material is apparent in Yeats's own work--- "The Wanderings of Oisin" (1889) and "The Old Age of Queen Maeve" (1903) exemplify his use of Gaelic

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5. Krans, W. B. Yeats and the Irish Literary Revival, p. 10.

sources. However, the Irish poets did not stop with the revival of Gaelic legends; they aimed to re-create an Irish style. Yeats said of this movement: "We sought to make a more subtle rhythm, a more organic form, than that of the older Irish poets who wrote in English, but always to remember certain ardent ideas and high attitudes of mind which were the nation itself, to our belief, so far as a nation can be summarized in the intellect."[6]

Perhaps the classic example of Yeats's use of Irish life is "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" (1893):

> I will arise now, and go to
> Innisfree,
> And a small cabin build there,
> of clay and wattles made:
> Nine bean-rows will I have there,
> a hive for the honey bee,
> And live alone in the bee-loud
> glade.

Although this poem is one of Yeats's most famous works, he grew to dislike it because wherever he went to lecture, the audience would insist on his reciting it. Therefore, he would usually recite it first in order to get it over with. Its popularity is due to its charm and its simplicity of style. With the exception of one phrase, "the bee-loud glade," the

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6. Yeats, Ideas of Good and Evil, p. 306.

vocabulary in the stanza quoted is prosaic; the only conscious poetic element is the inverted word order in line three. Because of Yeats's choice of simple words, this poem seems to reveal the peasant's mind and life. "The Song of the Old Mother" (1899) also makes use of the details of the life of Irish peasants: "I rise in the dawn, and I kneel and blow/ Till the seed of the fire flicker and glow;/ And then I must scrub and bake and sweep..."

Although they are not written in Irish dialect, poems like "The Song of Wandering Aengus" (1899) are Celtic in their subject matter, use of imagination and magic, and in their musical expression. Aengus was well known in Celtic literature and is used by Yeats as a symbol of life and the search for supreme beauty. In this and other poems, Yeats resembles Shelley in his desire for a perfect or intellectual beauty.

References to the hazel and its magic properties are common in Celtic folk-lore, as well as in many of Yeats's works. A mystical imagination and an intuitive understanding of nature are considered to be a part of the Celtic temperament.[7] When these

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7. Grierson, Celtic Temperament, p. 33 ff.

are expressed in poetry, the result is likely to be musical in expression, as in the line, "Through hollow lands and hilly lands..." The idea of the trout turning into a lovely girl is somewhat mystical and romantic; in this poem Yeats seems to be escaping from the realities of life into a beautiful world of his own:

I went out into the hazel wood,
Because a fire was in my head,
And I cut and peeled a hazel wand,
And hooked a berry to a thread;
And when white moths were on the wing,
And moth-like stars were flickering out,
I dropped the berry in a stream
And caught a little silver trout.

When I had laid it on the floor
I went to blow the fire aflame
But something rustled on the floor,
And someone called me by name:
It had become a glimmering girl
With apple blossom in her hair
Who called me by my name and ran
And faded through the brightening air.

Though I am old with wandering
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,
I will find out where she has gone,
And kiss her lips and take her hands;
And walk among long dappled grass,
And pluck till time and times are done
The silver apples of the moon,
The golden apples of the sun.

"The Wanderings of Oisin" (1889) was based on

translations of an eighteenth-century Irish work and of some poems in Middle-Irish; consequently, it is romantic rather than realistic. It is the story of the dialogue between St. Patrick and Oisin, who has come back to Ireland after three hundred years in wonderland with his fairy bride. Yeats's attitude toward the symbolism in this poem is interesting, for it is diametrically opposed to his views on symbolism in his later works. He said: "Under the disguise of symbolism I have said several things to which alone I have the key. The romance is for my readers. They must not know there is a symbol anywhere."[8] In his later volumes of poetry, Yeats included extensive notes, giving explanations of the more difficult symbols. In his first attempts to use symbolism, Yeats had felt that it was an illegitimate device, but he later upheld symbolism by linking it with magic and spiritualism.

This early poetry, like Yeats's later work, expresses not his age, but his own personality. While other poets were striving to explain modern science and its effect on the world, Yeats was engaged in finding an understanding of himself and

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8. Hone, op. cit., p. 64.

of his art. Nothing appears in his poetry that has not passed through and been transformed by his imagination; Yeats always remained romantic enough to allow his imagination a free rein.

In writing of Ireland, Yeats did not confine himself to peasant and Celtic legends; instead he sometimes wrote poetry on controversial matters in Irish public life. "On Those That Hated the 'Playboy of the Western World,' 1907" although short, is a caustic comment on those who misunderstood Synge's play. "On Hearing That the Students of Our New University Have Joined the Agitation Against Immoral Literature" (1910) was not inspired by a personal experience, but rather by an occurence of importance in the Irish literary world. However, poems on current happenings in Ireland and the world make up only a small part of Yeats's work; for although the poet was interested and active in political and literary Ireland, he could find no system which would serve as a basis for creative art in matters of political life.

However, Yeats continued to treat Irish materials in his poetry. Yeats used satire when writing "To

a Wealthy Man Who Promised a Second Subscription to the Dublin Municipal Gallery If It Were Proved That the Public Wanted Pictures" (1914) and "September, 1913," which shows Yeats's loss of faith in the middle class who "fumble in a greasy till/ And add the halfpence to the pence/ And prayer to shivering prayer, until/ You have dried the marrow from the bone." In this and later poems, O'Leary, a leader in the Sinn Fenian movement, became a symbol of romantic Ireland, "dead and gone,/ It's with O'Leary in the grave." Even though Yeats was the central figure in Irish literary activities, he was unable, as the preceding poems show, to create his system out of Ireland and her problems.

A large part of the disillusion which appeared in Yeats's work was caused by "the frustration which attended so much of his activities in Irish politics. He had hoped to mold Ireland to fit the mental pattern of his poetic system, but found that Ireland was not the soft wax under his hand that he had anticipated."[9] He was also irritated by the pettiness and meanness of the ordinary citizen with whom his work in Ireland brought him into constant

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9. Daiches, Poetry and the Modern World, p. 159.

contact.

As a poet and artist, Yeats had felt a need and a desire for some authority upon which he could base his work. In an attempt to supply this basis, he turned to science, where he found little of value in the works of Darwin and Huxley. He could not agree with their theories because they were in opposition to his imagination.[10]

As it became obvious that he could not accomplish the things in Ireland for which he had hoped, Yeats turned to studies in the occult, still hoping to find an answer to the puzzle of the universe and life. Ireland had failed him as a source of poetry and as a basis for artistic creation; so he turned with hope to experiments in magic and spiritualism.

About his poetry on Irish subjects, Yeats wrote that he desired to create a little world out of the beautiful, pleasant, and significant things of the world and to show Ireland for those who wished to see it. This aim to present a beautiful picture of the world did not last as Yeats's ultimate goal in poetry. Instead, his experiences with magic,

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10. Warren, The Rage for Order, p. 67.

spiritualism, and symbolism increased his interest in and fascination in things not of the world. Yeats was aware of this change and wrote about the transition which took place in his work: "Quite suddenly I lost the desire of describing outward things, and found that I took little pleasure in a book unless it was spiritual and unemphatic. I did not then understand that the change was from beyond my own mind, but I understand that writers are struggling all over Europe against that 'externality' which a time of scientific and political thought has brought into literature."[11] Yeats's failure to accept science accounts for his attempts to understand and participate in various psychological "religions" and magic, which also became part of his philosophy in his efforts to establish an authority.

Therefore, Yeats's experiences in the occult might be called a reaction against the materialism of the world as he saw it. His mind was easily swayed and convinced by spiritualism as it had been when, as a child in Sligo, he had listened with fascination to tales of fairies, ghosts, and magic. Trying to find a basis for his symbolism, Yeats

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11. Reid, op. cit., p. 60.

embraced in turn Rosicrucianism, Theosophy, and the doctrines of Swedenborg.[12] None of these was able to serve as an authority for the poet, and so he turned to magic and its practices; symbolism was a part of magic for Yeats: "I cannot," he wrote in 1924, "now think symbols less than the greatest of all powers whether they are used consciously by the masters of magic, or half unconsciously by their successors, the poet, the musician, and the artist."[13]

For Yeats, art in all its aspects was linked with and related to magic, whose fundamental theories he accepted as part of his philosophy: "1) that the borders of our minds are ever shifting, and that many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy. 2) that the borders of our memories are as ever shifting, and that our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself. 3) that this great memory can be evoked by symbols."[14] These doctrines are significant in Yeats's work. In "The Tower," Yeats makes use of the idea that many minds

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12. -----, "Erin's Great Poet," Time 35: p. 76.

13. Yeats, Ideas of Good and Evil, p. 60.

14. Ibid., p. 142.

can flow into one another when he evokes the spirits of those who have lived before him in order to solve the problem of age. That Yeats believed that Nature can be evoked by symbols is shown everywhere in his use of symbolism; however, Yeats also believed that any idea can be evoked by the proper symbol and that the symbol is superior to the statement of the idea. Failing to find what he had been searching for in spiritualism, Yeats turned to beauty and Maud Gonne as symbols.

The search for supreme beauty was one of the recurrent themes in Yeats's poetry; in the Rose poems, published in 1893, the symbol of the rose often represents intellectual or perfect beauty in addition to life, love, and Ireland. "The Rose of the World" is the rose of supreme beauty, which "Under the passing stars, foam of the sky,/ Lives on this lonely face." "The Lover Tells of the Rose in His Heart" makes use of the rose as a symbol of beauty---"your image that blossoms a rose in the deeps of my heart." Here the rose is also a symbol for Maud Gonne, who, for Yeats, was supreme beauty. Many of Yeats's love lyrics were inspired by and

written for Miss Gonne. This love became a symbol of beauty in poems such as "He Remembers Forgotten Beauty," and "He Tells of the Perfect Beauty."

The symbolism in "He Mourns for the Change That Has Come Upon Him and His Beloved and Longs for the End of the World" (1899), which is about the poet's relationship with Miss Gonne, is difficult and complex. The hound and the deer refer to a Gaelic poem about Oisin's journey to the country of the young. The hounds are related to the Hounds of Hades who are white and have red ears and also to the hounds that the Irish country people believe will awake and seize the souls of the dead if one laments too loudly or too soon:[15]

> Do you not hear me calling, white
> deer with no horns?
> I have been changed to a hound with
> one red ear;
> I have been in the Path of Stones
> and the Wood of Thorns,
> For somebody hid hatred and hope and
> desire and fear
> Under my feet that they follow you
> night and day.

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15. Menon, W. B. Yeats, p. 33.

A man with a hazel wand came without
a sound;
He changed me suddenly; I was look-
ing another way;
And now my calling is but the calling
of a hound;
And Time and Birth and Change are
hurrying by.

I would that the Boar without
bristles had come from the West
And had rooted the sun and moon and
stars out of the sky
And lay in the darkness, grunting,
and turning to his rest.

The "man with a hazel wand" is obviously Aengus, while the West, with its sunset, is symbolic of darkness and death. The symbolism in this poem is both magical, as in the hazel wand, and Celtic, as in the legend of Oisin. Again, Yeats had not discovered that for which he had looked; the disillusionment that he suffered because of his unhappy love affair with Miss Gonne is reflected in much of his later poetry. "The Folly of Being Comforted," which was published in 1904, is a poem very different from the love poems in The Wind Among the Reeds. "Never Give All the Heart" (1904) is a bitter denunciation of love in which Yeats warns against loving wholly: "He that made this knows all the cost,/ For he gave all his heart and lost." He also warns against

loving too long: "I have loved long and long,/ And grew to be out of fashion/ Like an old song." In these and similar poems, Yeats is more concrete and makes use of very little symbolism.

Not only in his youth did Yeats write of Miss Gonne, but also as an old man his poems were sometimes a remembrance of this love, for it became a symbol of his youth. So it is that the poetry of Yeats's middle age began to take on a different aspect; in "No Second Troy" (1910), Yeats admitted that Maud "filled my days/ With misery..." However, Yeats began to realize that with age he was acquiring a wisdom he did not possess in his youth:

> Though leaves are many, the root
> is one;
> Through all the lying days of my
> youth
> I swayed my leaves and flowers in
> the sun;
> Now I may wither into the truth.

With this wisdom came a new power, an ability to understand and explain human emotions, which are common to all men. This power, which was lacking in his earliest work, is present and perfect in the Tower poetry.

It was in middle age that Yeats first began to

look at youth with nostalgia and to envy its easy, carefree life. In "To a Child Dancing in the Wind" (1914), Yeats conveys a poignant desire to be free from worry, disappointment, and bitterness:

> Dance there upon the shore;
> What need have you to care
> For wind or water's roar?
> And tumble out your hair
> That the salt drops have wet;
> Being young you have not known
> The fool's triumph, not yet
> Love lost as soon as won,
> Nor the best labourer dead
> And all the sheaves to bind.
> What need have you to dread
> The monstrous crying of the wind?

The symbolism in this poem is obvious; the elements represent the stresses and strains of life, and the dead labourer is O'Leary, who died when the Irish movement was still in its infancy. This longing for youth and resentment of middle age grew more fierce as Yeats became an old man; then, he seemed almost obsessed with the horror of physical age. In the Tower poems, this loathing for old age reaches its apex.

In summary, it seems that Yeats's youthful verse was devoted to an attempt at discovering a vital basis for poetry; its themes are often Celtic and

Irish. His desire to find a faith upon which he could formulate a philosophy of poetry led him to experiences in politics and the occult. It also led to romanticism, which appeared in Yeats's work combined with magic and symbolism, both of which had their origin in Celtic legends and folk-lore. When Ireland failed him, Yeats turned with renewed hope to studies in spiritualism; this, too, offered him little help, but the influence that these experiences made upon Yeats's poetry is great. All of the elements which are present in Yeats's early work---Gaelic legends, supreme beauty, horror of age, and spiritualism---are essential parts of Yeats's later work.

It is interesting that Yeats could never put his complete faith in any organized belief---whether it was religion, science, or Theosophy. Ultimately, it was Yeats, himself, who developed a system which combined and altered the principles of several of these philosophies; it was this system that became the foundation for his greatest work.

CHAPTER II

THOOR BALLYLEE

> An ancient bridge, and a more ancient
> tower,
> A farmhouse that is sheltered by its
> wall,
> An acre of stony ground...

Up until 1917, Yeats had passed through several phases without finding an authority; yet he continued to search for a system, hoping to find an answer to the puzzle of life.

In this search for a system of symbolism, Yeats unwittingly found a symbol which became the inspiration for much of his great work; the symbol of the Tower, Ballylee.

Some years before his marriage in 1917, Yeats had come into possession of the Norman Tower of Ballylee, located in county Galway, near Galway Bay. He had first seen Ballylee as a young man when he had been collecting Gaelic legends for a collection of Irish fairy tales. The legends about the Tower, which were later used by Yeats in the Tower poetry, appeared in Yeats's Celtic Twilight, where he said:

> I have been lately to a little
> group of houses, not many enough
> to be called a village, in the

> barony of Kilartan in County Galway, whose name, Ballylee, is known through all the west of Ireland. There is an old square castle, Ballylee, inhabited by a farmer and his wife, and a cottage where their daughter and son-in-law live, and a little mill with an old miller, and old ash-trees throwing shadows upon the little river and great stepping stones.
>
> I went there two or three times last year to talk to the miller about Biddy Early, a wise woman that lived in Clare some years ago, and about her saying, 'There is a cure for all evil behind the mill-wheels of Ballylee,' and to find out from him or another whether she meant the moss between the running waters or some other herb.[1]

Yeats often visited Ballylee to discover more about Mary Hynes, a beautiful woman whose name was still a legend in Ireland, although she had died more than sixty years earlier. An old man brought Yeats to the castle, where Mary Hynes had lived, and pointed out the important features of the place. He said: "That is the little old foundation of the house, but the most of it is taken for building walls, and the goats have ate

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1. Yeats, Celtic Twilight, pp. 35-36.

those bushes that are growing over it till they've got cranly, and they won't grow any more. They say she was the handsomest girl in Ireland, her skin was like dribbled snow...and she had blushes in her cheeks."[2]

Yeats also inquired about a poem which Raftery, a famous Irish poet, had written about her. Yeats had first heard about the poem from an old woman who lived about two miles from Ballylee and who remembered Raftery and Mary Hynes. She said that she had never seen anybody as handsome as Mary Hynes and that she didn't expect to until she died. She also told that Raftery was nearly blind and that "he had no way of living but to go around and to mark some houses to do, and then all the neighbors would gather to hear. If you treated him well, he'd praise you, but if you did not, he'd fault you in Irish. He was the greatest poet in Ireland."[3] This old woman sang the poem to Yeats in Irish, and "every word was audible and expressive, as the words in a song were always, as I think, before music grew too proud to be the garment of words." Yeats thought that the poem was not as natural as

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2. Yeats, Celtic Twilight, p. 39.

3. Ibid., p. 41.

the best Irish poetry, for the thoughts were arranged in a traditional form, which made the half-blind man speak as if he were a rich farmer offering the best of everything to the woman he loves. These legends which Yeats learned about the Tower, Mary Hynes, and Raftery have became an integral part of his poetry. Even the physical surroundings of Ballylee were woven into symbolism by Yeats, and many of his poems have their setting at Ballylee.

Ballylee, which was probably constructed soon after 1232, had occupied a part of the Gregory estate which had been acquired for the purpose of redistribution among the people by the Congested Districts Board. No one wanted the Tower and two attached cottages, one of which was in ruins; so Yeats was able to purchase the property, which included a tiny walled garden and a grove of trees, for thirty-five pounds. It appears that Yeats had no particular purpose in buying the place, but it was to prove useful to him both as a summer home and as a central symbol in his poetry.

After his marriage, Yeats decided that if his

wife liked the place, they would restore the buildings and make Ballylee their home.[4] Mrs. Yeats approved of Ballylee and so they set about getting it in order.

When the Irish literary circles heard about the Tower, George Moore, the critic, said it was rumored that "Yeats was going to live in a tower in the west of Ireland to cultivate a 'Poetic Personality.'"[5] This remark was in keeping with the criticisms of Yeats's early poetry which was romantic in its structure, for the critics had often before accused Yeats of living in an "Ivory Tower."

However, the idea of living in an old Norman castle was not as romantic as it appeared on the surface, for first, Yeats and his wife had to make the place habitable. This they did with little help from others; most of the work was done by the poet and his wife.

In a letter to his father, John Butler Yeats, in June, 1917, Yeats wrote about the work they were doing to make the tower habitable:

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4. Hone, op. cit., p. 331.

5. Ellmann, Yeats, The Man and The Masks, p. 236.

> We hope to be in Ballylee by the end of July but building is slow and there is no certainty. George [his wife] is at this moment at the Castle, where she has a man digging in front of the cottage that she may plant flowers.[6]

The Yeatses had oak furnishings, including the "great trestle table," built at Ballylee; some of this furniture could never be removed from the Castle, as it could not be carried down the winding stairs. Mrs. Yeats repaired the ceilings with old mill boards which she had painted. However, the Tower was roofless; so the second and third floors were open to the weather. As a result, the finest apartment, the "Ladies' Room," which was at the top of the Tower, was never made habitable.[7]

And, in another letter to his father, on July 16, 1919, the poet said:

> I am writing in the great ground floor of the castle--pleasantest room I have yet seen, a great wide window opening over the river and a round arched door leading to the thatched hall...there is a stone floor and a stone-roofed entrance hall with the door to the winding stair to the left, and then a larger

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6. Ibid., p.332.

7. Hone, op. cit., p. 340

> thatched hall, beyond which is a cottage and kitchen. In the thatched hall imagine a great copper hanging lanthorn (which is, however, not yet there but will be I hope next week). I am writing at a great trestle table which George keeps covered with wild flowers.[8]

In 1919, Yeats was offered a teaching position in Japan; he refused because the Tower needed "another year's work under our own eyes before it is a fitting monument and symbol."[9] So, the Yeatses spent the summer of 1919 at Ballylee. Yeats's reading at the Castle included Joyce's Ulysses, Ossendowski's Beasts, Men and Gods, and two novels by George Sands.[10] In October of the same year, Yeats decided that he must "earn a roof for Thoor Ballylee"; so he made a lecture tour in America. However, when he returned to Ballylee, he and his wife decided to use the money for another purpose; so the Tower remained roofless. The open top of the Tower was no great inconvenience, however, and it provided the poet with a symbol which was of importance to him--- that of a tower with a ruined top.

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8. Ibid., p. 341.

9. Ellmann, op. cit., p. 239.

10. Hone, op. cit., p. 370.

Soon after Yeats had made the Tower habitable, he had reason to fear for its safety. In 1920-1921, the British Black and Tans and Auxiliaries were tracking down the Irish Republican Army and Terrorising the civilians. Yeats expected to hear that Ballylee had been robbed and sacked because the British were in that district. Lady Gregory, who was a friend of Yeats and a co-worker in the literary movement, reported from Coole that it was rumored that the Auxiliaries intended to settle at Ballylee, "as it affords greater facilities than Drumbosha for hanging their prisoners from a bridge." However, when Mrs. Yeats next visited the Tower, it showed signs of having been entered, but little or nothing was missing. Yeats had been concerned about his "sea-green slates," which were stored in the "Ladies' Room," but they, too, were unharmed. However, they were never used for the roof as the local builders said that such an elaborate roof could not withstand the Atlantic storms. The Tower was finally provided with a flat roof.[11]

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11. Ibid., pp. 353-354.

During the summer of 1922, Yeats wrote to Mrs. Shakespear, an old friend of his, from Ballylee:

> ...the Tower is much nearer finishing so that we have a large bedroom with a fine wooden ceiling. George is very happy....What do you think of our new address---Thoor Ballylee? Thoor is Irish for a tower and it will keep people from suspecting us of modern Gothic and a deer park.[12]

In a letter to John Quinn, patron of Irish literature and art, Yeats said:

> ...It is a great pleasure to live in a place where George makes at every moment a fourteenth century picture. And out of doors, with the hawthorn all in blossom all along the river banks, everything is so beautiful that to go elsewhere is to leave beauty behind.[13]

The peace which Yeats had found at the Tower was short-lived, for in the summer of 1922, Ballylee was visited by both the Republican and and National Armies. The old bridge leading up to the Tower was blown up by the Republicans, and

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12. Ibid., p. 371.

13. Ibid., p. 369.

when Yeats asked permission to remove Anne and Michael, his children, to a safer place, he was refused. However, he was given enough time to put them in the upper room of the Tower before the mine was laid.[14]

The Tower was left intact, and Yeats went on with his plans for the roof. When he received the Nobel Prize in literature in 1923, "for his consistently emotional poetry, which in the strictest artistic form expresses a people's spirit,"[15] several of his friends, expecially John Quinn, were worried that he would spend the money he received on Ballylee. He wrote to Quinn:

> You needn't fear that we shall spend any of that money on Ballylee. I put aside the proceeds of my last lecturing tour for that purpose and I still have a substantial sum left, intended in part for a concrete roof, for we still live, when there, protected not very perfectly by the floors above. We are not in a mood to spend much on it at present, for, with Cuala and the Senate, neither of us can be long away from Dublin....[16]

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14. Ibid., p. 373.

15. Marble, Nobel Prize Winners in Literature, p. 253.

16. Hone, op. cit., p. 382.

The Tower undoubtedly meant much to Yeats, for it was a place of refuge, an inspiration, and a home for his family. Some of his best poetry was written at Ballylee; at sixty years of age, he completed "Sailing to Byzantium," "Among School Children," and "A Woman Young and Old."[17] All of these poems are among the best known poems which Yeats ever wrote.

But, ultimately, the Tower proved to be impractical because of its isolation and inconvenience, and the Yeatses abandoned it in 1929. The dampness had contributed to the poet's rheumatism, and Mrs. Yeats had to bicycle to Gort, which was four miles from Ballylee, for provisions regardless of the weather. Today, there is almost no sign of Mrs. Yeats's gardens; the thatched roofs of the cottages are ruined, but the Tower still defies the weather.[18]

Yet during his ten summers at the Tower, Yeats had gained more than temporary shelter. He had found at last what he had been seeking: a system of symbolism which could serve as a basis for his

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17. Ibid., p. 398.

18. Ibid., p. 439.

artistic creation. The Tower symbolism with its many Irish and Gaelic allusions gave Yeats a concrete basis for his poetry and enabled him to write with more surety and power. In fact, it was only when Yeats found in the Tower a satisfactory symbol that his poetry achieved true greatness.

CHAPTER III

THOOR BALLYLEE IN YEATS'S POETRY

I declare this tower is my symbol;
I declare
This winding, gyring, spiri ng treadmill
of a stair is my ancestral stair...

I

Ballylee first appeared in Yeats's verse in the poem, "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory," published in 1919. Here, the tower is not used as a symbol; the poem is a description of the place and does not imply any other special meaning:

Now that we've almost settled in
our house
I'll name the friends that cannot
sup with us
Beside a fire of turf in th' ancient
tower,
And having talked to some late hour
Climb up the narrow winding stair
to bed:
Discoverers of forgotten truth
Or mere companions of youth,
All, all are in my thoughts tonight
being dead...[1]

For all the things the delighted eye
now sees

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1. It is interesting to observe that, although Yeats had not yet conceived of the Tower as a symbol, the line, "climb up the narrow winding stair to bed," was later used by critics to describe Yeats's own life in his pursuit of a basis for art. (See, for example Daiches, Poetry in Modern World, p. 168).

Were loved by him [George Pollexfen, Yeats's uncle];
The old storm-broken trees
That cast their shadows upon road and bridge;
The tower set on the stream's edge;
The ford where drinking cattle make a stir
Nightly, and startled by that sound
The water-hen must change her ground;
He might have been your heartiest welcomer.

In "Ego Dominus Tuus" (1919), Yeats gives an exposition of his theory of self and anti-self; Michael Robartes represents the poet who is seeking to find and understand himself. Although the poem is set at Ballylee, the tower has no special significance. Robartes and Aherne, the self and the anti-self, appear again in "The Phases of the Moon" (1919), where the poet is again studying in the Tower, trying to find understanding through his books. In this poem, Yeats, for the first time, writes of his system of the twenty-eight phases of the moon. According to this system, one's personality can be placed or arranged in one of the phases. However, man is forever changing so that life

becomes the progress around this great wheel. The Tower is sometimes used by Yeats as a symbol of this idea; the Tower, in that case, stands for the spiral or revolving courses through which all things, including man, must pass.[2]

Yeats also used the Tower as a setting in "A Prayer on Going Into My House" (1919); the language in this poem is simple, and there is no symbolism. Here the Tower is mentioned only as a personal possession and as the poet's home.

"To Be Carved on a Stone at Thoor Ballylee" (1921) is another poem in which Yeats shows his pride in possessing the tower. When this was written, Yeats had not fully developed his idea of the gyre and its relation to the tower:

> I, the poet William Yeats,
> With old mill boards and
> sea-green slates,
> And smithy work from the
> Gort forge,
> Restored this tower for my
> wife George;
> And may these characters
> remain
> When all is ruin once again.

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2. Baker, Howard, "Domes of Byzantium," Southern Review VII, (1942) 646.

Again, in "A Prayer for My Daughter" (1921), there is little connotation in his use of the tower; the atmosphere created by the sea and the weather are more important than the tower in setting the mood:

> I have walked and prayed for
> this young child an hour
> And heard the sea-wind scream
> upon the tower,
> And under the arches of the
> bridge, and scream
> In the elms above the flooded
> stream;
> Imagining in excited reverie
> That the future years had come,
> Dancing to a frenzied drum,
> Out of the murderous innocence
> of the sea.

"Meditations in Time of Civil War" (1928) also shows Yeats's pride in the possession of his house; Yeats gives a description of the tower without symbolical meaning in this poem. It is interesting, however, to notice that all of the objects at Thoor Ballylee which Yeats used as symbols are mentioned in this poem:

My House

An ancient bridge, and a more
ancient tower,
A farmhouse that is sheltered by
its wall,
An acre of stony ground,
Where the symbolic rose can break
in flower,
Old ragged elms, old thorns
innumerable,
The sound of the rain or sound
Of every wind that blows;
The stilted water-hen
Crossing stream again
Scared by the splashing of a
dozen cows;

A winding stair, a chamber arched
with stone,
A grey stone fireplace with an
open hearth,
A candle and written page...

II

Slowly, the tower and its furnishings began to take on a deep significance for Yeats. The winding stair became a gyre, which was the enblem of the spiritual ascent of mankind. A sword kept in the tower and given him by Sato, a Japanese friend, was a symbol of beauty. In the garden grew the rose which Yeats had used as a symbol of

supreme beauty in his earlier poetry. Gradually, the vague images of his youth gave way to the concrete images of the Tower and stair. The Tower became a sort of microcosm to Yeats; here life was controlled by symbolism.[3] He also made us of the history and legends of Ballylee in his poetry.

In "The Second Coming" (1921) and "Demon and Beast" (1921), Yeats used his idea of the gyre and of the wheel or circle whose center cannot hold. This kind of symbolism is closely related to the winding stair image which Yeats used in his Tower poems. Fundamentally, the principle is the same; in both cases, the winding or curving motion represents man's progress from one stage in life to another. Sometimes the progress is made by an individual person; at other times, the symbol represents mankind in general, as in "The Second Coming":

> Turning and turning in the
> widening gyre
> The falcon cannot hear the
> falconer;
> Things fall apart; the centre
> cannot hold;

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3. Ellmann, on. cit., p. 239.

Here anarchy is loosed upon
the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed
and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is
drowned;
The best lack all conviction,
while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity...

This poem is a prediction of what later happened in Europe under the dictatorships of the Fascists and Nazis. At that time, the "ceremony of innocence was drowned" and the best men were unable to act, while the worst were fanatical and cruel.

By contrast, Yeats seems to be referring to himself in "Demon and Beast"; here it is a personal struggle toward the top of the spiral:

For certain minutes at the least
That crafty demon and that loud
beast
That plague me day and night
Ran out of my sight;
Though I had long perned in the
gyre,
Between my hatred and desire,
I saw my freedom won
And all laugh in the sun....

The personal struggle which Yeats has described in "Demon and Beasts" results in freedom and happiness,

which is quite different from the outcome he predicts for all mankind in "The Second Coming." Although Yeats had long been plagued by his hatred and desire, he felt that he would ultimately be free of them both; this would occur at the top of the spiral where all opposites are fused.

It was in the 1928 volume, The Tower, that Yeats developed his symbolic tower to the maximum; however, the Tower is not always the same; it may represent several things in one poem. For example, the Tower may be interpreted as the struggle of an artist toward perfection in his art, the struggle of man for wisdom, the progress from birth to death, and the progress of nations. Perhaps it was this new symbolism which made The Tower the greatest success of Yeats's career---it sold two thousand copies in the first month. Of the volume, Yeats said: "Re-reading The Tower, I am astonished at its bitterness and long to live out of Ireland that I may find some new vintage. Yet that bitterness gave the book its power and it is the best

book I have written...."

In the poem entitled "The Tower," Yeats used the Tower as the setting for the poem, describes the legends about Thoor Ballylee, and then compared himself with those who had lived there before. The persons mentioned in the poem are associated with Ballylee by legend. Mrs. French lived at Peterswell in the eighteenth century; one of her relations, Sir Jonah Barrington, told the incident of the ear and the trouble that resulted because of it.[4]

> I pace upon the battlements and
> stare
> On the foundations of a house, or
> where
> Tree, like a sooty finger, starts
> from the earth;
> And send imagination forth
> Under day's declining beam,
> and call
> Images and memories
> From ruin or from ancient trees,
> For I would ask a question of them
> all.
>
> Beyond that ridge lived Mrs. French,
> and once
> When every silver candlestick or
> sconce

---

4. Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 451.

Lit up the dark mahogany and
the wine,
A serving-man, that could divine
That most respected lady's every
wish,
Ran and with the garden shears
Clipped an insolent farmer's ears
And brought them in a little covered
dish.

Next, he recalls the legend of Mary Hynes, which had first attracted him to Ballylee. Raftery, a blind poet, wrote the poem about Mary Hynes's beauty. The drowned man is also a part of the legends associated with the beauty of Mary Hynes.

It is interesting to observe the classical reference in this stanza. Although he was not a scholar, Yeats often used such allusions in order to make the Tower a symbol which would refer to all times and all places.

Some few remembered still when I
was young
A peasant girl commended by a song,
Who'd lived somewhere upon that
rocky place,
And praised the colour of her
face,
And had the greater joy in praising
her,
Remembering that, if walked she
there,
Farmers jostled at the fair
So great a glory did the song confer.

And certain men, being maddened
by those rhymes,
Or else by toasting her a score of
times,
Rose from their table and declared
it right
To test their fancy by their sight;
But they mistook the brightness of
the moon
For the prosaic light of day---
Music had driven their wits astray---
And one was drowned in the great
bog of Cloone.

Strange, the man who made the song
was blind;
Yet, now that I have considered
it, I find
That nothing strange; the tragedy
began
With Homer that was a blind man,
And Helen has all living hearts
betrayed.
O may the moon and sunlight seem
One inextricable beam,
For if I triumph I must make men
mad.

Yeats now evokes the spirit of Hanrahan, a character of his own creation who appeared in Stories of Red Hanrahan. Hanrahan's pursuit of the phantom hare and hounds is a part of that collection. The ghosts had been seen, according to legend, at a game of dice in what later became Yeats's bedroom. The old bankrupt man lived about a century earlier; according to one legend he could leave Ballylee

only on Sunday because of his creditors, and according to another he hid in a secret passage.[5]

> And I myself created Hanrahan
> And drove him drunk or sober
> through the dawn
> From somewhere in the neighbouring
> cottages...
>
> Good fellows chuffed cards in an
> old bawn;
> And when that ancient ruffian's
> turn was on
> He so bewitched the cards under
> his thumb
> That all but one card became
> A pack of hounds and not a pack
> of cards,
> And that he changed into a hare.
> Hanrahan rose in frenzy there
> And followed up those baying
> creatures towards---
>
> O towards I have forgotten what---
> enough!
> I must recall a man that neither
> love
> Nor music nor an enemy's clipped
> ear
> Could, he was so harried, cheer;
> A figure that has grown so fabulous
> There's not a neighbour left to say
> When he finished his dog's day:
> An ancient bankrupt master of this
> house.

Yeats, having evoked all the spirits associated with the Tower, asks himself:

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5. Ibid., p. 451

...Did all men and women, rich
and poor,
Who trod upon these rocks or passed
this door,
Whether in public or in secret
rage
As I do now against old age?
But I have found an answer in those
eyes
That are impatient to be gone;
Go therefore, but leave Hanrahan,
For I need all his mighty memories.

Elsewhere, the ruined top of the Tower symbolizes the desolation and broken ideals of man. The "dead top" suggests the end of the spiral, which is far from pleasant; in the case of man, the end is death, and in the case of nations, the end is destruction. The Tower symbol, as used by Yeats, differs from the symbols used by most poets, for it has many meanings, all of which are a necessary part of his philosophy of art. In "Meditations" (1928), the Tower symbol reveals Yeats's disappointment in Ireland and the horror he felt during the Civil War:

May this laborious stair and this
stark tower
Become a roofless ruin that the
owl
May build in the cracked masonry
and cry
Her desolation to the desolate
sky.

In other poems, the "ruined top" of the Tower represents modern nations, which Yeats described as "half-dead at the top."

Yet, however, he used the Tower symbol, the end of the spiral, or the top of the Tower, is the place where all opposites are fused; here the self and anti-self become one. Here the search for wisdom is ended; here, life and death become one. The apex of Yeats's philosophy is the top of this spiral which represents the end and goal of man's life. Death is the final goal of man, and at death, all other goals---wisdom, power, creative ability---are realized.

The power which is present in The Tower is responsible for the greatness of much of Yeats's later work, for, instead of losing this power as

he grew older, Yeats developed a new and more universal concept of poetry. Because of the concrete basis of the symbols, the symbolism in The Winding Stair (1929) is less complex than in Yeats's earlier works. As an introduction to this volume, Yeats wrote: "In this book and elsewhere, I have used towers, and one tower in particular, as symbols, and have compared their winding stairs to the philosophical gyres..." He also pointed out that Shelley made use of towers in his poetry and that gyres may be found in the philosophy of Swedenborg and Aquinas.[6]

By using the winding stair as a symbol, Yeats was able to provide a means to the top of the tower or spiral, which is man's ultimate goal. The stair both repeats and progresses. At each landing, one is able to see oneself at the lower landings and to recognize the differences in that lower being, as well as the similarities. In other words, each landing includes all that has gone before, but with a difference. Man in this way proceeds from youth

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6. Ibid., p. 454.

to old age, always including the earlier positions in the present one. David Daiches said that the Tower poetry "shows Yeats mentally ascending a winding stair, corkscrewing his way from the past to the present, from youth to age, advancing yet repeating, changing yet preserving, including earlier patterns in the present one. In an age without tradition he has to build one out of his own life, making each phase of his life a chapter of a myth, and of the same myth."[7] So, Yeats, himself, by climbing the progressive and repetitive stair was able to build a tradition, or a system, out of his own life. This, then, was the system upon which he built his finest poetry.

Using the Tower and stair as symbols of life, Yeats found that the Tower is ruined at the top. As a man grows old, he cannot carry forward the past and include it in the present because his faculties are decaying; therefore, old age, the top of the Tower, is a ruin, both physically and mentally. Yeats raged against old age and its

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7. Daiches, op. cit., p. 168.

liabilities in a good deal of his poetry; he resented its intrusion upon the mind and the body. In "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" (1929) Yeats reveals his bitterness toward old age and toward death. His self claims the right to live again and again; it claims its right to re-climb the stair. But the soul opposes this:

> I summon to the winding ancient stair;
> Set all your mind upon the steep ascent,
> Upon the broken, crumbling battlement,
> Upon the breathless starlit air,
> Upon the star that marks the hidden pole;
> Fix every wandering thought upon
> That quarter where all thought is done:
> Who can distinguish darkness from the
> soul;

Because the Tower had no roof, Yeats could see the stars when climbing the stair to the upper apartments at night. "That quarter where all thought is done" is the top of the Tower, or spiral, which represents death. Presently, Yeats's "Self" refers to the Japanese sword which hung in the Tower:

> The consecrated blade upon my knees
> Is Sato's ancient blade, still as it was,
> Still razor-keen, still like a looking glass
> Unspotted by the centuries;
> That flowering, silken, old embroidery, torn
> From some court-lady's dress and round
> The wooden scabbard bound and wound,
> Can, tattered, still protect, faded adorn...

When Yeats uses Sato's sword, he is using another of his possessions symbolically. The blade is life and is still "razor-keen," and its sheath is pure beauty, even though it is tattered and faded. The sheath and sword are set up against the Tower; beauty and life are pitted against old age and death. The Self explains:

> A living man is blind and drinks his drop,
> What matter if the ditches are impure?
> What matter if I live it all once more?
> Endure the toil of growing up;
> The ignominy of boyhood; the distress
> Of boyhood changing into man;
> The unfinished man and his pain
> Brought face to face with his own clumsiness;
> The finished man among his enemies?
>
> ...I am content to live it all again
> And yet again, if it be life to pitch
> Into the frog-spawn of a blind man's ditch...

In the final stanzas, the Soul argues that only the dead can be forgiven and ascend to heaven, but the Self claims its right to live again, even to the extent of suffering and pain. Yeats has, in this dialogue, reached a high point of perfection in poetry and in his use of symbolism. The symbols here, are, unlike those of his youthful verse, based on concrete objects; from them, Yeats was able to generalize upon human experience. Richard Ellmann sums up the Tower symbolism by saying: "Thus Yeats, in youth, had a tower of ivory, but because he was worried at his neighbors' disapproval and uncertain, anyway, of the tower's stability, he went out into the world and brought back ordinary building materials with which he replaced every piece of ivory. At last the edifice was all brick and stone. Then, still not certain, he crowded the interior with supports which were symbols of the outside world. But to him, however built and refurnished, the tower was still the ivory one of his youth."[8] This is, most definitely, what Yeats did with the Tower symbolism. Gradually,

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8. Ellmann, op. cit., p. 291.

he replaced his youthful symbols with the concrete properties of Ballylee. The symbols about the Tower were so detailed as to include the stairway, the sword he received from Sato, the roses in the garden, the roofless Tower, and the butterflies that flew into the top of the Tower. These took on themselves the significance which Yeats had assigned before to symbols such as the Rose, the mask, and Aengus. However, when Yeats had completely changed his system of symbolism, it was still similar to that of his youth; it was still full of romantic and mystical allusions, which were always a part of Yeats's philosophy and poetry.

A repetition of the symbols present in the dialogue is found in "Symbols" (1929):

> A storm-beaten old watch-tower,
> A blind hermit rings the hour.
>
> All-destroying sword-blade still
> Carried by the wandering fool.
>
> Gold-sewn silk on the sword-blade,
> Beauty and fool together laid.

The watch-tower is again old age, the blind hermit, senile man who has reached its top. Sato's sword, here a destroyer of life, and its sheath, beauty, are laid together by the fool, senile man.

There is a different interpretation of the Tower symbol in "Blood and the Moon" (1929). Here the Tower is the poet's own old age and also the old age of civilization; both are half-dead at the top. It is not only Yeats's Tower, but it belongs to Goldsmith, Swift, Berkeley, and Burke. They, too, have tried to climb its stair toward wisdom, which is reached at old age and at death. The Tower was built by the Normans and is a symbol of them and of all those who have climbed its stair and whose blood has been shed there during Ireland's past age. The references to other towers, other cultures, and other persons directly imply a universal meaning for the Tower symbol. "Blood and the Moon" is probably the most effective of Yeats's poems in the use of the stair and Tower:

> Blessed by this place,
> More blessed still this tower,
> A bloody, arrogant power
> Rose out of the race

Uttering, mastering it,
Rose like these walls from these
Storm-beaten cottages---
In mockery I have set
A powerful emblem up,
And sing it rhyme upon rhyme
In mockery of a time
Half dead at the top.

In the second stanza, Yeats describes the towers of ancient civilizations and of the poet Shelley:

Alexandria's was a beacon tower,
and Bablyon's
An image of the moving heavens, a
log-book of the sun's journey and the
moon's;
And Shelley had his towers, thought's
crowned powers he called them once.
I declare this tower is my symbol;
I declare
This winding, gyring, spiring treadmill
of a stair is my ancestral stair;
That Goldsmith and the Dean, Berkeley and
Burke have travelled there...

All men must travel the same path--toward the apex of the Tower, where at the top of the spiral, man can find wisdom. But with this wisdom, he also finds death and decay. For, even as he reaches the top of the Tower and catches a glimpse of the moon, which represents pure imagination, he is reminded that the Tower has, in its time, been the scene of man's bloody struggles with his fellow-man:

> The purity of the unclouded moon
> Has flung its arrowy shaft upon the floor,
> Seven centuries have passed and it is pure;
> The blood of innocence has left no stain.
> There, on blood-saturated ground, have stood
> Soldier, assassin, executioner,
> Whether for daily pittance or in blind fear
> Or out of abstract hatred, and shed blood,
> But could not cast a single jet theron
> Odour of blood on the ancestral stair!
> And we that have shed none must gather there
> And clamour in drunken frenzy for the moon.

Yet man, in his struggle to find wisdom, is blind to this bloodshed. And in the light of the moon, Yeats recognizes the goal of poets and other artists---power and wisdom. And he asks:

> Is every nation like the tower,
> Half dead at the top? No matter what I said,
> For wisdom is the property of the dead,
> A something incompatible with life; and power,
> Like everything that has the stain of blood,
> A property of the living; but no stain
> Can come upon the visage of the moon
> When it has looked in glory from a cloud.

Only imagination in its glory does not retain the stain of blood; power, which belongs to the living, and wisdom, which belongs to the dead, are achieved only through blood.

XIX

Thus, in his use of symbolism, Yeats found that his Tower could represent the progress of life; the past merging with the present; the old age of man, of civilization, and of nations; the striving toward knowledge and wisdom; and the power of the Normans, a symbol of early Ireland. Not only did Yeats use these meanings specifically, but he also added a universal interpretation to them. All levels of meaning may be present in the same poem at the same time. It is the universality of the symbol that makes his poetry true not only for his own generation but also for all time.

Obviously, Yeats was a poet of intense earnestness who was dissatisifed until he had found a philosophy of life and a symbolism which would help him convey it to his readers. He was never limited by his early theories of poetry or by his

early philosophy; his life was a constant struggle to find a system which would be a working basis for his poetry and which would explain the universe. This struggle and its resolution in the creation of the Tower symbolism produced his finest work and enabled him to achieve an identity with all mankind.

Yeats's later poetry becomes more significant when one realizes that Yeats, who had always been in love with art, was now also in love with life. For him, to be in love with life implied being in love with death.[9] As the symbols in his poetry became more concrete, his thoughts become more abstract. Only a fortnight before his death, Yeats wrote to Lady Elizabeth Pelham:

> I know for certain that my time will not be long...In two or three weeks---I am now idle that I may rest after writing much verse---I will begin to write my most fundamental thoughts and the arrangement of thought which I am convinced will complete my studies. I am happy, and I think full of energy, of an energy I had despaired of. It seems to me that I have found what I wanted.[10]

And Yeats had found what he wanted at Ballylee.

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9. Speaight, "William Butler Yeats," Commonweal 29 (1939) 624.

10. Hone, on. cit., p. 510.

for there he had found a philosophy of life and a system of symbolism which made his poetry great.

In fact, just one week before his death, Yeats, although far from Ballylee, wrote a poem entitled, "The Black Tower." And although he did not employ in it the tower symbolism of earlier poems, he reveals that he was still mindful of the symbol which had served him so well.

Knowledge of Thoor Ballylee and the symbolism which Yeats created around it should, surely, be accepted as vital elements in his poetic achievement, for it was through the use of this symbolism that he achieved mastery of himself and his art. Indeed his own career is like a winding stair, ascending toward mastery and wisdom. Mr. Ellmann rightly says of him: "During a lifetime of bitter toil Yeats constantly advanced and penetrated until he had evolved a world which has more solidarity than that of any poet since Wordsworth. Few poets have found mastery of themselves or their craft so difficult or have sought such mastery, through conflict and struggle so unflinchingly."[11] So, after years of struggle, Yeats was able to ascend

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11. Ellmann, op. cit., p. 295.

the winding stair to the top of the Tower, where he found wisdom and mastery. Bringing all of his past experience up the stair and uniting it with what he found at the top of the Tower, Yeats was able to capture and hold the moon of pure imagination and to incorporate all the elements of wisdom, power, mastery, and imagination in his poetry.

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